

Matter Of Fact

By Joseph And Stewart Alsop

"FBI" Becomes "Secret Service"

J. EDGAR HOOVER, chief of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, is both an able and an ambitious man. One ambition which he has cherished for a long time has been to extend the empire of FBI to include responsibility for foreign clandestine intelligence. It now appears that this ambition is in a fair way to fulfillment. Admiral Sidney Souers is now considering an order which would have the effect of decapitating the Strategic Services Unit, the only existing secret service agency, and handing over its functions to the FBI.

The Strategic Services Unit consists of the "cloak and dagger" sections of the defunct Office of Strategic Services. It has two main branches, SI, or Secret Intelligence, and X2, the branch which has the responsibility for foreign counterintelligence. The order, as now contemplated, would call for the complete elimination of SI, and the amalgamation of X2 with the FBI. The seriousness of this move would lie in the fact that the experienced administrative and operating personnel of these two sections would leave virtually in a body if FBI took over. The special skills and professional knowledge of the SI and X2 would thus be lost to the American intelligence effort.

Nor is this all. Both SI and X2 have large and immensely valuable files of intelligence material. These files are the result partly of their own efforts, and partly of their close wartime association with the British Secret Intelligence Service, the French Deuxieme Bureau and the Polish, Dutch, Belgian, Chinese and other intelligence services. If the SI and X2 men resign—and even the messenger boys, according to one informed guess, would probably leave—these files would lose much of their value. Meanwhile, the FBI, which has had virtually no foreign intelligence experience except in South America, would have to start from scratch to build a foreign clandestine intelligence organization.

IN STARTING from scratch, moreover, FBI would lack another important advantage which both SI and X2 have enjoyed. This is a reasonable measure of cooperation from the British. The British, unlike the Americans, have practiced the complex art of secret intelligence for centuries. Only their cooperation allowed the SI and X2 men to reach a professional standard. The FBI would have no British help, for the FBI is by no means popular with the British.

One reason among several is that the FBI led the move to force the British Colonel Ellis, who headed the British Secret Service here early in the war, to leave the country. Ellis represented not only the Secret Intelligence Service, but M16, the counterespionage organization SOE (Special Operations Executive), MOE (Morale Operations Executive) and other branches of the British Secret Service in this country. He reported direct to the fabulous Major General Menzies, head of all British secret service, whose name is quite unknown to the British public, although he can frequently be found holding forth genially in the famous White's Club, in London. Ellis' primary job was the protection from sabotage of those factories in this country making British munitions. The FBI opposed Ellis because his work overlapped with theirs. The British secret service, like the elephant, never forgets.

THERE IS STILL another aspect of the proposal to hand over the clandestine intelligence function to the FBI which deserves the most serious consideration. Before VJ-Day Maj. Gen. William Donovan submitted a paper to the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommending an independent American intelligence agency. This top secret document was leaked to the press, and it was widely attacked as a plan for an American Gestapo. Such accusations were obviously silly, since the proposal included no internal security force. If the FBI adds to its present functions the responsibility for espionage, however, this country will in fact have what only such nations as Germany, Japan, Spain and Russia have heretofore boasted, a secret service with the responsibility for both foreign espionage and internal security, and with the power of internal arrest. No secret service of the democratic countries has had this basic power. It would be folly to suggest that the FBI would in fact use its powers as they have been used in the totalitarian countries. Nevertheless, the pattern would be established, and it is a dangerous pattern.

It was for this precise reason that the forceful Edgar Hoover was excluded in the original executive order prepared by the chiefs of the State, War and Navy Departments, from any participation in the central intelligence agency except in an advisory capacity. It is quite possible that the new functions now considered for FBI will not in the end be conferred.

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